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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS SITREP
#3: JANUARY 6, 2006: HAMAS ENDORSES CODE OF CONDUCT FOR
ELECTIONS; CEC AWAITING RESPONSE FROM ABU MAZEN OVER
RESIGNATION LETTER

REF: A. JERUSALEM 04794

[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 00067

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Hamas January 5 endorsed a Code of Conduct for the January 25 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections that it had earlier refused to sign in October. The Chief Electoral Officer for the Central Elections Commission (CEC), Ammar Dweik, reported that Abu Mazen had yet to respond to the Commission's resignation letter. Dweik expressed concern for Election Day security, adding that elements within Fatah were determined to scuttle the election process. Dweik said that time was running out on establishing voting procedures in Jerusalem. End summary.

Hamas Signs Code of Conduct

[1](#)2. (C) Hamas spokesperson, Sami Abu Zuhri, January 5 reported that Hamas had endorsed the code of conduct signed by thirteen Palestinian factions on October 17 that requires the signatories to respect the outcome of the PLC elections and abide by rules of conduct during the campaign period (REF A). Abu Zuhri said that Hamas had raised two reservations to the 25-point document: Article 23 that stipulates commitment to laws of the Palestinian Judiciary regarding the elections process; and Article 24 stipulating commitment and acknowledgment of official and final results issued by the CEC and/or specialized court. Abu Zuhri said that Hamas wanted all the judges appointed to rule on such matters to be agreed upon by all the factions, and that the movement would accept the final results from the CEC as long as the electoral procedures were free of fraud or other irregularities.

Dweik: No Word From Abu Mazen
On CEC Resignation Letter

[1](#)3. (C) During a January 6 meeting with ConGen PolChief and Poloff, CEC Chief Electoral Officer Ammar Dweik reported that Abu Mazen had yet to respond to the CEC's January 4 resignation letter regarding the PA cabinet's decision to allow Palestinian security forces to vote in their duty stations instead of where they are registered to vote (REF B). PolChief informed Dweik that Abu Mazen told the Consul General in a January 5 meeting that the PA Ministry of Interior must observe CEC regulations for voting in the elections. Dweik said that he had received a call from PA Cabinet Secretary Samir Huleileh informing Dweik that the CEC

should handle the voting for the security forces as it saw fit. Dweik indicated that he has sought a written document to that effect from the cabinet but has yet to receive a positive response. He would await a January 8 PA cabinet meeting to see whether the cabinet clarifies its position on voting procedures for the security forces. With respect to early voting for the PA security forces, Dweik said that the CEC required Israeli cooperation to facilitate the movement of tens of thousands of security personnel.

CEC Worried About Election Day Security

14. (C) Dweik commented that he has little confidence in Election Day security for polling stations, especially in the Gaza Strip. "When Ala'a Husni (Chief of the PA police in Gaza) announces that he has a 'mutiny' on his hands, it gives the CEC no confidence," Dweik said. Dweik indicated that the situation was better in the West Bank, but he said that the CEC had received reports that some elements in Fatah may cause problems. He thought that international election observers would be able to operate in the West Bank without trouble, but admitted that some incidents (i.e. kidnappings) could be directed towards observers in Gaza. Dweik said that recent attacks against CEC offices in the West Bank and Gaza appeared organized and politically motivated by some elements within Fatah who sought to derail the elections. His suspicions were based in part on a recent conversation with a senior, unnamed PA/Fatah official, who told Dweik that one of the scenarios of those in Fatah determined to block the elections was to direct attacks against the CEC itself.

15. (C) Noting that security was the "first and top priority," Dweik complained that at this stage, the PA security forces had done nothing to stop attacks on CEC

facilities, including the recent attack on the CEC district office in Rafah. Dweik put the blame squarely on Nasir Yusif, adding that Abu Mazen should remove the PA Minister of Interior. Dweik said that the CEC maintained good contacts with the commanders of the PA Police and National Security Forces, but that change needed to be made at the top.

Awaiting Word on Jerusalem Voting

16. (C) On voting in Jerusalem, Dweik said that working level Israeli police and security officials had informed the CEC that it would allow candidates, with the exception of Hamas, to campaign inside the municipal boundaries -- as long as those activities were coordinated first with the CEC. Dweik said that the Commission was reluctant to play the role of approving campaign activities since it should be left to the candidates themselves. He noted that in the 2005 PA presidential elections, candidates coordinated their activities through the PA Ministry of Civil Affairs. Dweik said that a decision needed to be made soon whether elections would proceed in Jerusalem as they had in 1996 and in January 2005, since the CEC would need time to prepare.

PA Leadership Divided Over Elections

17. (C) Dweik argued that the problems of election preparations in the West Bank and Gaza did not compare to those faced in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq there is a "coalition" to provide security and support to the electoral process, and a government that clearly wanted elections to occur, Dweik said. Israel was neutral, at best, in the upcoming PLC elections; however, the PA leadership was clearly divided over how to proceed. While Abu Mazen had made public statements in support of the elections, Prime Minister Abu Ala'a was clearly opposed, while PLC Speaker

Rawhi Fattuh had openly stated his opposition to the elections taking place on January 25. Dweik said that these elements were working to block the elections. (Note: Ramallah-based Tanzim activist Husayn al-Shaykh January 6 related to ConGen Pol FSN his belief that elections should be delayed given the internal security chaos and the likely prospects of a strong Hamas showing in the PLC elections. He opined that Abu Mazen might be embarrassed to inform the USG that he was incapable of controlling the security situation in the territories. End note.)

Summary of Local Press Coverage

18. (SBU) PLC elections continued to dominate reporting in all Palestinian papers. The dailies January 6 front-paged reports that sources in Washington stated that the Palestinian elections should go ahead as planned despite the uncertainty caused by PM Sharon's health situation. The reports quoted White House Spokesman Scott McClellan, who added that the Bush administration has conveyed this position to Abbas.

-- Al-Hayat al-Jadida quoted Secretary Rice commenting that Hamas's participation in the legislative elections is an internal Palestinian affair, but adding that all parties have a right to take part in elections.

-- Nabil Sh'ath was quoted in al-Ayyam saying that Israel's position on voting in East Jerusalem will not change as a result of Sharon's absence from the political scene. Sh'ath said he believes Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will pursue the same policy Sharon would have adopted, and that he expected elections will take place in Jerusalem.

-- Al-Quds reported that the CEC submitted a resignation letter to PA President Abbas asking him to appoint a new Commission as the current staff objected to a decision by the Palestinian cabinet that allows the opening of voting centers at security forces' headquarters, which the CEC considers a violation of law.

-- Al-Quds reported that Hamas has suspended its election campaign in Khan Yunis in order to "focus all efforts" toward resolving the bloody conflict between two major families there.

Op-eds:

-- Columnist Rajab Abu Sariya commented in al-Ayyam that by not declaring a clear position concerning elections in Jerusalem, Israel mainly aims at denying the Palestinians a positive environment in which to hold their election campaigns.

-- In its main editorial, al-Quds held that Hamas's considerable presence in Palestinian society cannot be overlooked and that its involvement in the political process is an essential "requirement for a true Palestinian democracy."

WALLES